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ABSTRACT

This case study examines the interaction between basic education (primary education, adult literacy, and nonformal adult education) and economic development needs in rural Zhuji County, Zhejiang Province, located in southeast China. In Zhuji, parents traditionally have endured hardships to send their children to school and otherwise encouraged their children to strive for the highest level of education possible. To many peasants, admission to a polytechnic school or university seemed the only possible escape from farming. As a result, Zhuji has eliminated illiteracy. Nevertheless, the continued emphasis on purely "academic" achievement left the county with thousands of junior and senior high school graduates who lacked any of the technological knowledge or skills needed for local economic development aims. In 1987, the authorities addressed this problem by formulating a policy of promoting basic education, vocational education, and adult education geared to development aims. Concrete measures included banning preparatory courses for university entrance examinations, reforming the enrollment system for junior and senior high schools, reinforcing the educational monitoring system, and increasing attention to labor skills taught in schools. Agricultural and vocational education were expanded in junior and senior high schools and adult technical schools. However, vocational education continues to be hampered by problems, including shortages of funds and teachers, peasant resistance, and inability to predict specific educational needs of the local economy. Education finance in Zhuji is outlined. (SV)

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Basic Education and Social Development in China's Rural Areas

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The case for basic education opportunities for all the people of a nation is made on the ground that basic education contributes to social and economic development of the country and that it adds to the quality of life of people. This article, based upon a case study in rural Chinese Zhuji County, ¹ presents a survey of the interaction between basic education (primary education, adult literacy, and non-formal education for youths and adults) and socio-economic development in rural areas. It focuses on: (1) the relationship between basic education and the needs of local economic construction; (2) the adjustment of the education to the needs of the economic development of rural areas; (3) resources to support the education. The survey holds mirror to one aspect of China's basic education development and its

lessons over the past decade.

Gearing Basic Education to the Needs of Local Economic Construction

As a preliminary stage of the whole process of education, basic education answers at least three general purposes: (1) develop one's ability in social intercourse, which calls for basic moral education, the "three Rs" and the initiation into the rudimentary knowledge of both natural and social sciences; (2) improve one's ability to survive and live, which calls for education or training as regard daily necessities of life and hygiene, etc.; (3) cultivate one's ability in basic productive activities, which calls for integration of education and economic conditions under which man lives. In other words, education should be carried out in order to help one form proper labor habits and to help the young people, who have no opportunity to enter a school of a higher grade, acquire some basic skills of production or receive some fundamental vocational training.

Zhuji people, however, look upon entering a higher school as the main purpose of education, owing to the underdeveloped commodity economy in the County and the traditional psychology of "regarding farming and studying as family heirloom". It has long been a tradition there for parents to endure hardships of every description so as to send their children to enter a school of a higher grade until they get enrolled in a university. It has become a popular saying among Zhuji

peasants that "sending one more kid to university is as good as reclaiming one mu of field". To many peasants, the admission to a polytechnic school or university mean the only opportunity to quit farming. In the rural areas of the county, it is a common practice to study hard, especially in places where the economic development is relatively slow. Since the founding of the P. R. China, Zhuji County has been taking the lead in promoting basic education and spare-time education for workers and peasants. It is one of the first counties to have basically popularized primary education and to have generally eliminated illiteracy. In 1986, it was conferred the title "Advanced County in Promoting Basic Education" by the State Education Commission.² A great many people are puzzled by the fact that Zhuji, though an advanced county in basic education, has stayed middling for years in terms of economic growth (as compared with the other counties within the province). For years people have been talking about this strange " Zhuji Phenomenon". On the one hand, it sends about one thousand promising students to schools of higher grades every year; on the other hand, it is in desperate need of talented people for its economic construction. Statistics of 1988 suggest that its technological personnel in the field of natural sciences accounts for only 3.3 percent of its total population and that the people with professional skills in the county make up merely 1.5 percent of the total number of such people in the whole province and they make up 0.6 percent of the population

of Zhuji County.³

Every year more than 15,000 people graduate from junior high schools in Zhuji, but only 2,000 get admitted to senior high schools. Among 2,700 senior high school graduates every year in Zhuji, about 800 get enrolled either in universities or in polytechnic schools. Thus as many as 14,000 people, who graduated from senior or junior high schools, will return to the countryside every year. At present there are approximately 2,300 students in all the vocational schools in Zhuji, accounting for roughly 15 percent of the returned high school graduates.⁴ This means that about 85 percent of the returned youth are slow in adjusting themselves to the local economic construction simply because they lack labor skills of various kinds-- a drawback obviously caused by the concept and practice of " education for the sake of entering a higher school." Zhuji County is rich in natural resources and it has 2,100,000 mu of hilly land as well as over 53,000 mu of ponds or reservoirs.⁵ Planting and aquatic-breeding, however, is still at its initial stage there. Its township-run enterprises have mushroomed, but their workers and staff members are poorly equipped in terms of knowledge and labor skills. Although the development of both agriculture and township-run enterprises calls for people with professional skills, Zhuji is now badly in need of a solution to the tough problem of having, on the one hand, thousands of high school graduates unadjusted to the local economic construction and, on the other hand, rich natural resources waiting to be tapped

and developed.

In 1985, the Chinese central government brought forth the guiding principle that " education must be geared to the needs of socialist construction which in turn must rely on education".⁶ Accordingly, Zhuji people began to reflect upon and discuss from different angles the phenomenon that education in rural areas was divorced from reality. A reform was carried out with its emphasis on remolding the structure of secondary education and developing vocational education. During this period, education in the rural areas of Zhuji County had the following characteristics: (1) the theory of "education for the sake of entering a higher school" had come under attack, but in practice it remained to be a dominating force; (2) vocational education began to mushroom, but it lacked clear-cut guiding lines; therefore, too much emphasis was put on regular education, which resulted in the disappearance of the distinction between vocational schools and ordinary senior high schools; (3) the implementation of the general guiding policy for running schools in rural areas was still in its experimental stage.

Starting from September, 1987, Zhuji people came to understand more clearly the importance of gearing education to the needs of the local economic construction. A policy of "balancing three types of education", namely, basic education, vocational education and adult education, was brought forward. Meantime, a criterion--" those which do not gear education to the needs of economic construction should not be considered

good schools even if they have high ratios of sending pupils to a higher school"--was set up in Zhuji. In order to guarantee the fulfillment of this criterion, four concrete measures have been adopted. First, the banning of preparatory courses for university entrance examinations, which cater to those senior high school graduates who have already failed once or more but still want to take another matriculation. Second, the enrollment system, in the cases of senior and junior high schools, has been reformed. Primary school graduates no longer take unified examinations but all enter automatically the junior high schools which are close to their residence. In the case of senior high school entrance examinations, examinees have to choose between ordinary schools or vocational schools (formerly they were allowed to apply for both). Third, the monitoring system has been reinforced so as to give overall appraisal of the quality of education and to strengthen directive power. Fourthly, due attention has been paid to manual labor and labor skills. The whole county has in conducting labor-skill education fulfilled its target of "four haves", namely, each school having its own teachers of labor skills, each grade having the corresponding teaching plan, each week having regular hours for teaching labor skills and each pupil having labor-skill textbooks.⁷

However, we must not lose sight of the fact that not only parents and school pupils in Zhuji are not fully aware of the importance of the shift in the aim of running schools, but

local township government leaders, too, have fuzzy ideas in this respect. Much remains to be done before people straighten out their ideas of running schools and turn the concept of "education for the sake of entering a higher school" into that of education for enhancing the quality of the whole nation.

Adjusting Basic Education to the Needs of the Economic Development of Rural Areas

Among the past forty years, the period starting from 1978 up to now sees the fastest socio-economic development of Zhuji. Its social output value in 1988 was 6.16 times as much as that in 1978. Within the same period its national income increased by 363%; its domestic output value increased by 366% and its total value of industrial output and agricultural output increased by 420%.⁸

The rapid economic development of Zhuji can be attributed mainly to the policy of reform and opening to the outside world which has been implemented since 1978. A great number of township-run enterprises which have emerged ever since are still progressing at the stage of mass labor--an economic model which does not need many intellectually talented people. In other words, what this type of economics needs most is simple labor. The manifestation of the role played by basic education in the socio-economic development, therefore, is far from obvious at this initial stage.

Since 1985, the speeded-up modernization process has been

pounding at the deeply rooted concept of small-scale peasant economy. Traditional agricultural models and business patterns now face a series of new challenges. The society is now paying increasing attention to scientific farming, vocational education and pragmatic technical training. It has become self-evident that the way out for agriculture lies in science and technology. Vocational education, as one of the contents of basic education, has begun to play a role in the socio-economic development and has already achieved considerable social and economic benefits.

Vertically, vocational education in Zhuji has developed in such a way that junior and senior vocational high schools or vocational training classes have been set up at the county level and the township level. Horizontally, ten other departments of the county are now going hand in hand with the department of education in running schools. A comprehensive three-dimensional network is taking shape. The length of schooling has been made flexible and diversified, depending on the needs of the society and the characteristics of each specialty. Vocational schools offer not only two-year and three-year courses, but also one-year, half-year, and monthly courses for training workers and staff members. In fact, vocational schools have taken on a multifunctional role in combining vocational education with various kinds of training for in-service workers and staff members. According to statistics, vocational schools in Zhuji provided the society with 2,258 talented people during the period of 1985-1988.⁹ In

recent years, 61 vocational school graduates have acquired professional skills required in pomiculture, tree planting and livestock husbandry; 95 have become the backbone of various enterprises and institutions; over 90 have become skilled craftsmen or technicians in architecture, sewing business and maintenance of machines and electrical appliances. All these young people have become pace-setters in the diligence-lead-to-prosperity drive which is gaining momentum in Zhuji's rural areas.¹⁰

Since 1987, forty-one adult cultural technical schools have been set up at the township/town level.¹¹ Adult education in the rural areas of Zhuji can be characterized as realistic, pragmatic and beneficial. The practical training it provides varies from time to time and from place to place, always catering to the specific needs such as the training of mechanics, textile mill workers, chemical plant workers, drivers, accountants, electricians and specialists in dress designing, planting, aquatic-breeding, agricultural machinery, etc. Thus it enjoys its great popularity. In 1988 alone the county opened 482 pragmatic technical classes and the total number of trainees reached 13,630.¹² The development of adult education, which is sound and diversified, plays an active role in enhancing the quality of labor, in vitalizing the local economy and in bringing prosperity to peasants.

We have noticed, however, the pace at which vocational education develops and its general scale in Zhuji still cannot satisfy the actual needs. It has already been pointed out

that although Zhujia has about 14,000 senior and junior high school graduates who return to the countryside every year, only 15 percent of them receive training in vocational schools. Most of returned youth lack labor skills of all kinds and find themselves a square peg in a round hole. On the other hand, countryside-oriented vocational schools such as agriculture schools, forestry schools and aquatic schools, which under normal circumstances should form the most vital and the most promising part of rural education, are now facing great difficulties in enrollment as well as retention. Their average retention ratio is lower than 80 percent and in some schools it is even lower than 50 percent.¹³ The survival of these vocational schools, which aim at promoting the local economic construction, is greatly endangered. What is at the root of the trouble? There are probably three reasons. First, it is hard for the departments of education and economy to predict the trend of local economic development, and the specific needs in terms of the quality and quantity of the talented people. Even if predictions can be made, the implementation of the policies based on these predictions can hardly be consistent in the present economic-system reform which is like groping in the dark. Second, all the cultivated lands as well as wooded and hilly lands are now taken care of by individual contractors who are more often than not shortsighted. Besides, agriculture is often subject to the influence of natural conditions and what it needs in most cases are simple skills or techniques. All these help account

for the fact that among peasants there is but a limited demand for vocational school graduates. Third, the operation of these schools is hampered by one stumbling-block after another: the wretched shortage of funds, the lack of normal channels for raising funds, the shortage of professional teachers, the lack of labor practice bases and what not. Because of the drawbacks inherent in the existing personnel and economic systems, the other departments have revealed a tendency to shift their responsibilities in jointly-run schools, leaving the department of education almost "single-handed." As to adult education in the rural areas, the criterion of serving the local economic construction has yet to be fully fulfilled. Oftentimes, the emphasis is laid on political education, law education and state-policy education, etc., to the neglect of pragmatic technical training. Some vocational schools are merely nominal.

Therefore, both vocational education and adult education need to be gradually perfected in the process of implementing the central government's policy of "adjustment, enrichment, consolidating and upgrading". One of the prerequisites for their perfection is that they should proceed from the actual conditions. Efforts should be made to reinforce backbone schools and at the same time, to multiply and diversify forms of schools. Two kinds of combination seem feasible: to combine pre-employment education with in-service training and to combine adult education with vocational education. Such methods as the streaming of classes should also be adopted and

popularized. In short, by using all these methods, we can hopefully overcome the above-mentioned difficulties and help towards the steady development of vocational education.

Opening Up Resources for Basic Education

The development of any cause presupposes certain material conditions. The development of educational cause needs increase in investment. From 1985 to 1989, Zhuji County spent an increasing educational fund from 11,840,000 yuan to 18,090,000 yuan. The annual educational expense of the county takes up a percentage between 30% to 40% of the total finance of the county. Besides the county finance, the additional educational funds collected since 1985 were respectively 2,120,000 yuan in 1985, 2,070,000 yuan in 1986, 2,200,000 yuan in 1987, 3,640,000 yuan in 1988, and 3,500,00 yuan in 1989.¹⁴

However, educational funds are still lacking. This kind of shortage shows itself most conspicuously in the absolute proportion of the fund spent on the total number of people. Take the actual expense of 1988 as an example: 13,550,000 out of 16,160,000 yuan from the county finance went into the salaries of teachers, occupying 83.4% of the educational investment. Out of the additional educational fund of 3,640,000 that year 1,694,000 yuan went into the pockets of teachers working in schools run by local people (the whole county has 960 such teachers in service and 274 retired ones), and another 274,000 yuan were used for subsidizing teachers in schools run by the state.¹⁵

From 1985 to 1988, the expense on the total number of teachers in the educational expense was high in percentage, and thus the absolute value rose directly, from 8,630,000 yuan in 1985 to 13,550,000 yuan in 1988. Accordingly the problem was that public affairs service fee was on the decline, and the percentage was declining from 27% in 1985 to 16% in 1988, absolute value decreasing from 3,209,000 yuan in 1985 to 2,610,000 yuan in 1988.¹⁶ Therefore, it made impossible for quite a few schools to improve the conditions for school-running, and to buy any necessary teaching facilities.

What we have to acknowledge is that the educational expense has occupied a considerable percentage of the total finance in Zhuji County. But, as far as the educational investment per head is concerned, it only has 16 yuan per head. And as far as the average expense for each pupil is concerned, there are only 120 yuan per head.¹⁷ The inner structure of pupils also betrays the shortage in expense. As early as in 1984 Zhuji County was already among the first batch of counties that were able to universalize junior high school education. Therefore, the problem is that junior high school pupils have occupied a percentage as high as 33.03% among the total number of elementary school and high school pupils in recent years.¹⁸ Because of this fairly big proportion of junior high school pupils, the expense is comparatively high, and the shortage of expense is made conspicuous.

The above analysis shows the educational funds are still in great shortage, despite the fact that they are being

gradually increased year by year. In addition, the economic situation has not been good in recent years. To ease the intense situation regarding educational funds, it would not be practical to expect a sharp rise of educational funds in proportion to the whole finance. Therefore, the main task will still rest in collecting additional educational funds. Since 1985, Zhuji County has carried into practice the policy running and managing schools and collecting educational funds at different levels. The confirmation of towns' or townships' authority in running and managing schools has urged the towns' or townships' government to shoulder the responsibility of developing educational cause. Generally speaking, the additional educational funds, which began to be collected since 1985, have been collected smoothly. Yet there are still unbalances in the work of collection. The sum of funds collected by some towns and townships has been showing a decline, and the difficulty in collection has been increasing. There are three kinds of situation in this respect. Firstly, the leaders set great store by collecting educational funds and, with responsibility take up by specific persons, the additional funds are collected as dictated and consequently distributed to schools. Secondly, the leaders have tried their best; yet owing to the actual conditions, the funds could not be raised in full. Thirdly, the leaders are at their wits' end, and the funds are not collected. On the whole, as long as the leaders take it seriously, and as long as the principle of running schools at different levels has been

accepted in practice, the collection of additional educational funds will be comparatively smooth.

Besides, Zhuji County has given a full play to the initiatives in all walks of life and has opened up various channels for collecting funds. In 1988, the people's educational fund was established, with 1,250,000 yuan collected; 75.8% of the schools have carried out the work-study program on the basis of "educating pupils and collecting money"; with a total annual output value amounting to 18,260,000 yuan (1989), among which 2,472,700 yuan was the pure profit and 815,600 yuan was spent on education.¹⁹

All the facts show that at present our country cannot possibly increase in great amount its educational funds, the best way to develop educational cause, improve school-running conditions in the countryside, and get out of the dilemma of educational-fund shortage is to bring into full play the initiatives of all people in the society, to depend upon masses, and to open up various channels for collecting educational funds.

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Notes

1. The county is located in the mid-north of Zhejiang Province, southeast China.
2. Bureau of Education of Zhuji County, "Educational Annals of Zhuji County," 1988, pp.2-4.
3. Bureau of Statistics of Zhuji County, "Today's Zhuji," 1989, p.20.
4. Ibid., p.24.
5. Ibid., p.12.
6. The Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, "The Decision on the Reform of the Educational System (May 27, 1985)," (Beijing: People's Press, 1985)
7. Bureau of Education of Zhuji County, " Bulletin," No. 10, 1987, pp. 5-7.
8. "Today's Zhuji," Op. cit. p. 15.
9. "Bulletin," Op. cit. No.2, 1989, p.4.
10. Ibid., No.12, 1989, p.6.
11. Ibid., No.8, 1988, p.5.
12. Ibid., No.2, 1989, p.3.
13. Ibid., No.5, 1990, p.7.
14. Ibid., No.4, 1990, pp.3-6.
15. Ibid., No.1, 1990, p.6.
16. Ibid., No.2, 1989, p.3.
17. Ibid., p.4.
18. Ibid., p.5.
19. Ibid., No.4, 1990, p.5.